

In May of 2011, the ASC Executive Board voted to send the attached letter to Senator Patrick Leahy and Congressman Chuck Grassley regarding Senate Bill 306 (National Criminal Justice Commission Act of 2011).

[Senate Bill 306 Letter of Support](#)

# *Criminology & Criminal Justice Policy Coalition*



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May 25, 2011

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Chair  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
437 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
135 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Leahy and Grassley:

On behalf of the Criminology and Criminal Justice Policy Coalition, a partnership between the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) and the American Society of Criminology (ASC), we write to express our support for S. 306, The National Criminal Justice Commission Act of 2011, and to urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to support and quickly move this important legislation.

The bill, introduced by Senator Jim Webb (D-VA) and co-sponsored by more than 20 Democratic and Republican Members of the Senate, would create a blue-ribbon commission charged with conducting a comprehensive review of the nation's criminal justice system. The goal of the Commission is to provide clear policy recommendations for responsibly reducing the overall incarceration rate and addressing the growing cost of the criminal justice system.

Originally introduced in the Senate in 2009, the bill is the result of two years of fact-finding in the Senate, including two hearings of the Joint Economic Committee focused on costs of the criminal justice system. Appointed by the President and the Majority and Minority in the House and Senate, the proposed Commission would bring together fourteen experts – representing the fields of criminal justice, law enforcement, public health, national security, prison administration, social services, prisoner reentry, and victims' rights – to review all aspects of the criminal justice system including current federal, state and local policies, practices and costs.

Over the past twenty five years, America's jail and prison population has risen dramatically; with only five percent of the world's population, the United States currently houses twenty five percent of the world's prisoners. A 2009 study issued by the Pew Center on the States reported that in 1984 1 in 77 Americans were in prison or jail, or on probation; by 2009, that number was 1 in 31. The total annual tax burden to support corrections, and the 2.3 million Americans housed in jails and prisons, is more than \$68 billion.

The statistics are staggering. At a time when the federal government and state and local governments are facing deficits and severe budget cuts, we should be prioritizing smart investments in corrections and identifying effective criminal justice interventions that can reduce the prison population while protecting public safety. The need for a comprehensive review of federal, state, and local practices, as proposed in the National Criminal Justice Commission Act, is long overdue. The creation of a commission tasked with conducting such a review and responsible for identifying best practices and offering recommendations across all aspects of the criminal justice system, is a critical first step toward establishing effective policies that balance public safety with the need to reduce the burden placed on our criminal justice system.

The Criminology and Criminal Justice Policy Coalition is committed to supporting the work of the Commission. We encourage you to pass S. 306 and look forward to working with the Senate Judiciary Committee to implement the recommendations of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Steven F. Messner  
President, 2010-2011  
American Society of Criminology  
Distinguished Teaching Professor of Sociology  
University at Albany, SUNY



Melissa Barlow  
President, 2011-2012  
Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences  
Professor, Department of Criminal Justice  
Fayetteville State University